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SEASONABLE AND CANDID THOUGHTS

ON

HUMAN CREEDS OR ARTICLES OF FAITH,

AS RELIGIOUS TESTS,

CONNECTED WITH

AN HUMBLE ATTEMPT TO ASCERTAIN

THE

TRUE CHARACTER OF JESUS CHRIST,

IN ANSWER TO AN EXTRACT OF

A LETTER FROM THE REVEREND —.

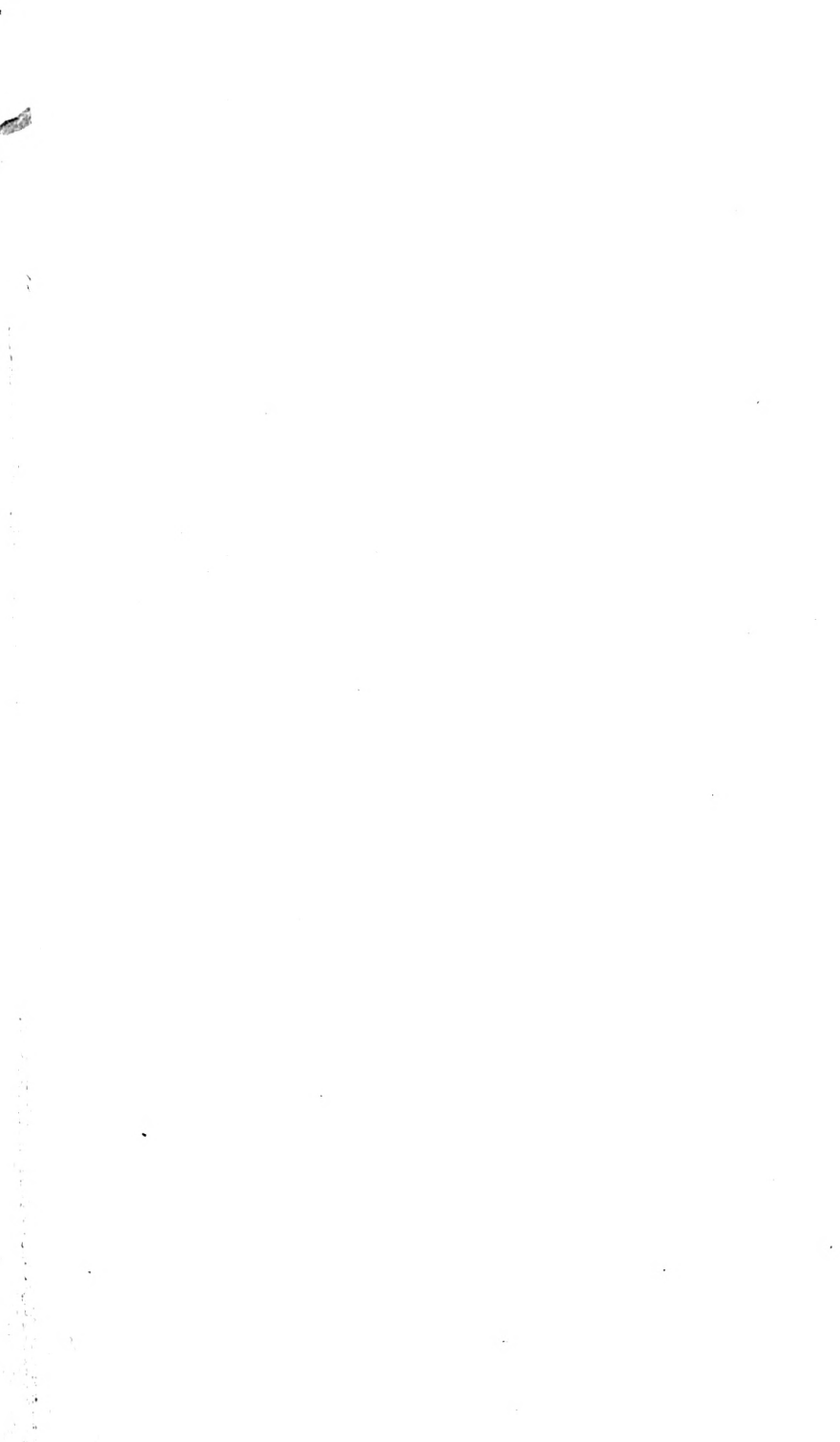
BY AN ORTHODOX CLERGYMAN OF MASSACHUSETTS.

“ *Utility* should be the leading motive of all publications.”

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SEASONABLE THOUGHTS, &c.

Extract of a Letter from the Rev. Mr. — to —.

Rev. and dear Sir,

***** I have further to observe that

Mr. —, a member of the association, to which I belong, has very greatly grieved and offended his associated brethren, by avowing it as his belief that Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God, is a being or intelligent agent distinct from his Father, and therefore, that he cannot be the self-existent and independent Jehovah. He however acknowledges him as that glorious personage, at whose name every knee is to bow, and every tongue is to confess as Lord, *to the glory of God the Father*. Such is the offence given to the association by the supposed error into which Mr. — has fallen, that they have it in serious contemplation to cut him off from their body as a dangerous member, and to disclaim all ministerial connection and fellowship with him, so long as he shall retain and avow his present sentiments, respecting the character of Jesus Christ. This line of conduct they think it their duty to pursue, not because they consider Mr. — as incorrect in his religious opinions, generally, nor on account of any immorality attached to his character, nor indeed because they view him as destitute of the true spirit of the gospel; but, principally, because he dissents from one or two articles, in their written creed, respecting the doctrine of the "Sacred Trinity."

What, my dear Sir, ought to be done in this case? What is the part, which christian and ministerial fidelity requires *me* to act, in relation to it? I cannot but consider Mr. — as a very serious, conscientious, faithful, diligent and successful labourer in the vineyard of

our common Lord. Can I then, consistently with christian charity, give my voice against him, and withhold from him ministerial fellowship and intercourse? By giving me your sentiments *without reserve* on this truly interesting and important subject, and particularly as it has a *bearing on articles of faith*, drawn up in other than scriptural language, as a bond of union among christian ministers, you will very greatly oblige your anxious friend and brother.

Rev. Mr. ———.



In answer to the above extract, the following communication was made.

Rev. and dear Sir,

YOUR letter bearing date ——— I have received, and read with very deep interest and concern. Previously to the receipt of it, I had been made acquainted with the state of your association in reference to Mr. ———, with respect to whose religious and moral character my sentiments perfectly coincide with your's. You ask, "what ought to be done in the case of Mr. ———, and what is the part which christian and ministerial fidelity requires *you* to act in relation to it?" As you express a wish that I would give you my sentiments, *without reserve*, on the important and interesting subject, I feel myself constrained, from the high opinion which I have of your candor and integrity, and from the sense I have of my obligation to you, as a christian brother, to comply with your request.

I know not how I can better discharge this obligation in part, than by transmitting you some of the thoughts, in relation to the subject in question, which I lately committed to paper, in consequence of having been informed that several of our brethren had been excluded from the christian and ministerial fellowship of the association, of which they had been respectable and active members.



***** "Christian brethren! what will you further say in vindication of your treatment of some

of your fellow labourers in the gospel vineyard, in excluding them from your christian and ministerial intercourse and fellowship, on account of their supposed heresy in relation to the subject under review? Will you say that you found it necessary thus to treat them, from the consideration that you could not otherwise have *honorably* supported the religious creed, or articles of faith, by which you are united as an orthodox association? But is this indeed an important ground or reason of your conduct? Let me then ask you, and in the spirit of meekness, of love, and of deep concern,—is it expedient, is it justifiable, by the principles of the mild, the gentle, the forbearing religion of the gospel, to frame and subscribe a creed, or any article of faith, as a bond of christian union, which has rendered it necessary to exclude from your association your christian brethren and fellow labourers, because they considered Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God, as a being or intelligent agent distinct from Him, who is his Father? Is it not possible that their view of the subject is correct? But let it be admitted, that it is not strictly conformable to the system of modern orthodoxy to believe, that the only begotten Son of God is not that very God, by whom he was begotten; or that he is not the self-existent and independent Jehovah, and at the same time a man consisting of a “human body and a reasonable soul” like other men, sin only excepted, or that Jesus Christ is not, strictly speaking, equal to his Father; or that his existence is not merely nominal, or an office, an affection, a mode, or an agency belonging to the one God, but that he is a being, or intelligent agent distinct from the one God. Let it be admitted that this view of Jesus Christ does not perfectly harmonize with reputed or real orthodoxy; yet may it not reasonably be questioned, to say the least, whether it is consistent with christian candor to adopt and patronize such a religious creed or article of faith, as to render it necessary to exclude from your fraternity and fellowship your christian brethren, whose sentiments of the character

of Christ thus vary from the orthodox standard ? and especially when their religious sentiments, in relation to other subjects, are generally, in your own estimation, correct and scriptural, and their moral and religious character and conduct fair, exemplary and unimpeachable ; and when, perhaps they are distinguished for their diligence and zealous assiduity in the promotion of experimental religion and practical piety.

If for the honour or support of a religious creed or any article of faith, expressed in the words which men's wisdom inventeth, you find it necessary to excommunicate from your association and christian fellowship, your brethren of this description, let me respectfully, and in the most serious manner ask, whether that creed or article ought not to be prostrated to the dust ? Can it have any just claim to your support ?— Indeed, may I not with propriety, and without cause of offence, ask, whether a religious creed consisting either of one or of many articles, expressed in language of human device, ought *ever* to be formed and advocated as a *test* of religious orthodoxy ? Has any individual, or any association of christians, a *right* on *christian principles* to form such a creed, and require their brethren to subscribe or give their assent to it, in order to their enjoying any privilege or institution of the gospel ? Let competent authority for this be produced, and their right will readily be admitted. But until this authority be produced, the right in question, may, to say the least, reasonably be disputed. Will it be pretended that any association of men are authorized by *Jesus Christ*, the sole constituted lawgiver and head of the church, to make a religious creed, or test ? Is any church, or any individual vested with this authority ? Is not Jesus Christ the *sole legislator* for his people ? and has he not made all such laws and regulations as are necessary for admission into his visible church or kingdom, for the enjoyment of its privileges, for the discipline of its members, and for the expulsion of those of them who do not demean themselves as proper subjects of his government ? This, it should seem, cannot reasonably be questioned. And will it

not be admitted that all these laws and regulations are good, and excellent, and perfect? By duly observing them we shall be preserved from error, both in opinion and practice, in relation to our treatment of our brethren and fellow christians. We shall never be in danger of treating them either with too much severity, or too much tenderness. We shall admit none to the enjoyment of our christian fellowship, but by unquestionable authority; nor shall we discipline any, or expel them from the fellowship of our associations or churches, but by the same authority.

The laws and regulations which Christ has instituted and given us for the directory of our conduct towards our brethren, and for the support of his cause and advancement of his kingdom, are all expressed in a *plain and intelligible manner*. We find in them no technical words and phrases; none which are mystical and hard to be understood. They all contain the simple and undisguised words of truth and soberness, and words which are well adapted to the understandings of all, so that none might fall either into speculative or practical error.

These laws are in number neither scanty nor redundant; neither less nor more, in *any sense*, than is necessary to a perfect whole. Infinite wisdom (with reverence be it said) could not have devised and given us a *more perfect rule* for the regulation of our conduct towards our christian brethren, than is comprised in these laws. They admit therefore neither of addition, nor of diminution. Nor indeed can we add to, or diminish their number, without impeaching the wisdom of the divine legislator. We cannot even alter them without impairing their excellence, and incurring his disapprobation and displeasure. With these laws and regulations then, we ought to be *fully satisfied*, with respect to their *number*, their *phraseology* and their *form*.

Christian brethren, can the truth or correctness of these remarks be reasonably questioned? For what *purpose*, then, is any religious creed or article of faith fabricated, not with the words which Divine

Wisdom suggested, but words which are the invention of fallible men, as a test of orthodoxy and christian fellowship? Does such a test furnish a *better criterion* of the correctness of a man's head, or the goodness of his heart, than that which is furnished by Christ, who is the sole constituted lawgiver and head of the church? If so, let it be adopted; let it be cherished; let it go into operation, and produce its designed effects. But if it possess not excellence superior to the criterion or test which the Bible furnishes, it is certainly *needless*, and of course ought not to be contended for or advocated. It *may not* however possess excellence which is *equal* to this criterion or test; and to say that it does not, ought to be deemed rather as a *modest confession* than a *presumptuous declaration*. Why then should we embrace, defend, and practise upon a creed, or any article of faith, drawn up by weak and erring men, when we have a *better one in all respects* dictated by the unerring spirit of inspiration?

Do not the framers and advocates of creeds and articles of faith, as tests of orthodoxy and christian communion, seem to confess that they are not satisfied with the Bible in relation to the subject? Do they not seem to say that the Bible is deficient in articles of faith and practice, either with respect to number, or perspicuity, or both? Do they not seem to say that their pens are more correct and luminous than the pens of inspired men? Do they not seem to acknowledge that christians, generally, are not capable of understanding, from the Bible, what they ought to believe and practise? In fine, do they not seem to acknowledge that it is unsafe to take the laws and regulations, which Christ has made and provided for his church, as a competent directory; and therefore it is necessary that their *deficiency should be supplied*? But is not language—is not conduct like this, very highly unjustifiable? Is it not indicative of that “knowledge which puffeth up,” and of that “faith which standeth in the wisdom of men, but not in the power of God?” Is it *consistent* with that unrivalled respect and reverence which are

due to the inspired scriptures, as a revelation from God, or to God himself, as the divine and original author? These are questions, christian brethren, of too serious and solemn import to be treated with neglect or superficial attention. They demand the most awakened, impartial and solemn consideration.

Will it be urged, that a religious creed, drawn up by any man, or body of men, in other than scriptural language, is *necessary* as a *guard* to the church of Christ, or to its ministers in their associated capacity, to secure them *from the infection of heretical errors*? But if such a creed be *really necessary* for this important purpose, must it not be admitted that the inspired scriptures are not a sufficient guard against the apprehended evil? Christian brethren! will you admit this? Will you treat the inspired scriptures with so much disrespect? Can *you*, who are set for the *defence* of these scriptures hold them in so low, so degrading an estimation, as to think and speak thus dishonourably of them? *With design*, I am persuaded you neither do, nor ever will. But if the scriptures furnish that guard and security to christians, in their associated capacity, against the corruption and evil of heresy, which is equal to that which infinite wisdom and care could devise and provide, why should any creed or articles of faith and practice, devised by human wisdom, be deemed necessary to prevent the mischief? But if such creed or articles be indeed necessary for this purpose, can they reasonably be considered as articles of *christian faith* or as *Bible doctrines*? If the christian scriptures furnish all that security against the intrusion of heresy into the church of Christ and ministerial associations, which was *deemed necessary by unerring and infinite wisdom*, must not all such articles of faith as are framed by the wisdom of men, as a security against heretical errors, be considered as *anti-scriptural*, or at least, as *unnecessary, and worse than useless*?

What is the *utility*, christian brethren, of any religious creed or articles of faith of human contrivance and imposition? *Do they operate, have they operated, or are they likely ever to operate as an effectual pre-*

ventive to unprincipled and heretical men gaining admission into the christian church, or ministerial associations? This, it is believed, will be urged by no man of careful observation, or of candid and deep reflection. Is it not a truth too obvious to be denied, or even questioned, that unprincipled and heretical men, to accomplish their base and selfish purposes, do not hesitate to subscribe any religious creed or articles of faith, however *foreign* from their real sentiments? Is it not equally true, that some, if not many serious and conscientious christians, who dare to think for themselves, and who cannot depart from Bible rule and authority, are deprived of christian association and privileges, because they cannot in conscience subscribe or assent to articles of faith, framed by human wisdom, and imposed by human authority? or are subjected to much inconvenience in obtaining these privileges, where they can enjoy them without unreasonable and forbidding restraint? And is it not also true that many christians subscribe or assent to these articles, either with much *mental reserve* or with submission of their *own faith* to the *faith of others*?

Will it be urged in favour of creeds or articles of faith, as tests of orthodoxy and christian fellowship, that they form a *bond* of affectionate and desirable *union* to churches and associations? But is not this idea much more easily urged than substantiated? Who will undertake to prove, or even to make it appear *probable*, that all the members of any christian church or ministerial association understand the articles to which they subscribe or give their assent, in *one or the same sense*? Who, indeed, that has paid the slightest attention to the subject can entertain a doubt, that they understand them in different senses, and in many instances, in senses widely different, if not *directly opposite*? And may it not with pertinency be asked, whether articles of faith, expressed in other than scriptural language, are not, to say the least, quite as liable to be understood in different senses, as articles consisting of that form of "sacred words" which the inspired scriptures furnish? Who that cherishes

a proper respect for these scriptures will deny, or even question the truth of this suggestion? Besides, it is not unfrequently the case, that articles of faith of human structure are assented to by the members of churches and associations, as agreeing *generally*, or in *the main*, with their sentiments or belief, but *not entirely*. Nor is it easy to conceive, that such articles, and especially when they are numerous, should ever be assented to, but in this qualified manner, by reflecting and conscientious christians. But can a confession of faith, thus loose and ambiguous, constitute a firm and certain bond of union to christian churches, or ministerial associations? As it is commonly, if not always unknown to the members, what portion of the articles of their agreement are believed or disbelieved by each other, or in what sense most of the articles are by each other understood, their assent to them can be considered even in the most favourable light, as expressive of but a general and indefinite agreement in opinion. What then can be the real benefit or utility of the supposed bond of union, arising from this loose and indeterminate assent to articles of faith of human fabrication?

As the assembly's shorter catechism, so called, is by many considered as the best criterion and most adequate test of orthodoxy, and by many assented to as agreeing generally with their views or sentiments, and as a bond of christian union, it becomes an important subject of inquiry, whether this use of it is calculated to produce any beneficial effects. That it neither does produce such effects, nor has any tendency to produce them, seems highly probable from the consideration, that this catechism is seldom if ever assented to but in so indeterminate and loose a manner, as to render it impossible to know, how many of its articles are believed or disbelieved by those who give their assent to it, or how nearly they harmonize in sentiment. Besides, what denomination of christians, or what individual christian, whether orthodox or heretical, but will readily assent to this catechism as *generally* true, or as true in relation to the greater part of the sentiments which it contains? Who, then, being

an advocate for subscription to articles of faith, as a religious test, would hesitate to subscribe or give his assent to the assembly's catechism, as a test of orthodoxy, in this general and vague sense? It is confidently believed, that no denomination of christians among us, however heretical in sentiment they may be deemed, but could thus subscribe or assent to the catechism, as consistent with their religious sentiments. Must it not then, as a test of orthodoxy, or bond of sentimental union, be considered as *deceptive and unavailing*?

Let it further be inquired, whether many christians, who are conscientiously opposed to articles of faith, expressed in other than scriptural language, and who of course decline subscription or assent to the catechism under consideration, as a test of orthodoxy and christian fellowship, do not hold it in as high estimation, in point of correctness, as many who do not scruple thus to assent to it? That this is really the case, cannot, it is presumed, be reasonably questioned. And yet, by their subscribing brethren they *may* be considered and treated as abandoning orthodox ground, or evangelical sentiments. And is it not a sad and humiliating truth, that this in *very deed* is too, too often the case! Highly as this catechism is to be estimated for its *hoary honors* and general correctness, it is nevertheless entitled to but very little respect when considered as a test of christian faith and fellowship, or as a bond of christian union. But what shall we say of it when considered as set in competition with the Bible, or rather as claiming a precedence to that holy and blessed book *as a rule of faith, or test of orthodoxy*? What shall we say of it? Let it be "cast to the moles and to the bats." *Let it sink into everlasting forgetfulness and neglect.*

But if articles of faith, drawn up by fallible and erring men, as tests of orthodoxy and christian fellowship, are neither *necessary* nor *useful*, must they not be *injurious* to the cause of pure and undefiled religion? That this *has been* the unhappy and lamentable case, in many respects, cannot reasonably be questioned,

Have they not been, principally, or in a great measure at least, the cause or occasion of the most *baleful evils* to the christian church? Whence but to this source are to be traced a large portion of those unhallowed contentions, angry disputes, acrimonious censures, and the unchristian, cruel, and relentless persecutions, which have tarnished and disfigured the amiable and lovely visage of our holy and beneficent religion? Besides, have not these religious tests operated as a very great discouragement to free and impartial inquiry after the truth as it is in Jesus! Have they not been greatly instrumental of obscuring the mild and clear light of the blessed gospel? Have they not been, in many instances, both the *father* and the *child* of hard favoured bigotry, severe superstition, and frantic enthusiasm? Have they not, in a high degree, been the occasion of tearing into many parts the mystical body of Christ, and of setting at irreconcilable variance those, who would otherwise have dwelt together in unity and love, as christian brethren? Have they not been greatly conducive to the aggrandizement of the ministers of religion, by effectually preparing the way to their acquisition of prodigious wealth, enormous authority, and the most gigantic and injurious power? and have not the grossest ignorance, the most supercilious temper, overbearing threats, and oppressive conduct resulted from these circumstances? Is it not to be added, that the injudicious and hurtful connexion between church and state which has long existed, and which now exists in so great a part of christendom, is to be traced up, in a great measure, to this sorrowful and wretched source?

That such *have been* the evils which have resulted from articles of faith devised and fabricated by human wisdom, as tests of orthodoxy and christian fellowship, will be questioned by none, who are conversant with the history of the church. That many evils result from them in *our day*, is too obvious to be denied; and that they *will greatly increase*, the signs of the times do but too alarmingly indicate. *That* human nature which existed in past ages, *now* exists, and who

can say that it will not again produce the same tragical effects in a religious view, as it produced in past ages? To guard against them then with much vigilance and studious care, must be the duty of all, and especially of those who are *set for the defence of the gospel*.

If evils, as above described, have resulted from the source we have been considering; if evils still result from it, and greater evils are to be apprehended, why should that source be kept open, and even made *wider and deeper*? Will it be urged, that the supposed beneficial effects which have resulted from it, or which it is expected will result from it, more than counter-vail the evil effects? It probably *will* be urged. But can any arguments or facts be produced, which will substantiate the truth of the assertion? It is confidently believed, that no such arguments or facts *ever have been produced*; and with equal confidence it is believed they *never will be*. If any beneficial effects have ever resulted from subscription or assent to human creeds or articles of faith, as religious tests, must they not have been too inconsiderable to merit honorable notice? Nor can it reasonably be expected, that any good will in future result from the practice, which would justify its vindication and support. Is it not then the dictate of christian prudence and sound wisdom to discountenance the practice? Rather ought we not to consider and feel it to be *our indispensable duty to discontinue and wholly to abandon it*?

By this, however, I would not be understood as denouncing religious creeds, articles of faith, or catechisms indiscriminately, nor as discountenancing them, considered as *aids* to religious instruction and improvement. Such compositions undoubtedly have been, and now are, in some instances, useful. All of this description, and as many more of like kind as may be written and published, have a claim to our good opinion and patronage. Let them live, be encouraged, circulated and improved as extensively as possible. But if we *must* have a religious creed or articles of faith drawn up and methodised by any man, or body of men, let the materials be collected from the scriptures

of truth, and expressed, as far as practicable, in *scriptural words*. To such a creed *no* christian will object. And to such a creed *all* christians, it should seem, must give a *decided preference*, who duly appreciate the Sacred Volume. If the articles contained in such a creed, or rather if the Bible from which they are taken, be not competent to bar improper persons from admission into christian churches and ministerial associations, *let them be admitted*. And if the rules and directions contained in the Bible be not sufficient to guide us to a suitable discipline and exclusion of such persons, *let them remain among us*. If we are straitened in this business, we most surely are not straitened in the *word of God*. If then we do not faithfully discharge our duty to our christian brethren—if we treat them with too much mildness, or with too much severity, let us not impiously charge the fault to the account of the Bible, but to our own *guilty selves*. Taking this holy book for our directory, to the *utter exclusion* of all articles and guides of human device, we shall believe, and walk, and act by a safe and sure rule. Nor shall we ever set at nought any christian brother, or exclude him from our fellowship, whom we ought highly to esteem for his work's sake, and very possibly for the correctness of his religious sentiments or opinions.”****

From the above communication you will learn, my dear Sir, what are my sentiments, generally, in relation to the subject stated in your very friendly and obliging letter. Should it be instrumental of satisfying your mind, as to “the part which christian and ministerial fidelity requires you to act in regard to it,” I shall be gratified. As the subject is highly important and interesting, you will, I am persuaded, consider it well, and do nothing rashly.

Whether it be expedient, or whether you may be desirous that any thing further or more explicit be said upon the subject, I know not; but as you express the wish that I would “give you my sentiments *without reserve*,” and particularly “as respects your duty per-

sonally," I will suggest, although contrary to my original design, some additional thoughts upon the subject.

"I cannot but consider Mr. ——," you say, "as a very serious, conscientious, faithful, diligent and successful labourer in the vineyard of our common Lord." This, Sir, you well know is the opinion which I have of him; and this, so far as I have been able to learn, is the opinion which all our christian brethren, to whom he is known, entertain of him. Must he then be cut off from your associated body, as an unworthy and dangerous member? Does not your mind recoil, does not your very soul revolt at a deed like this, *even in the contemplation of it*? And can you then be reconciled to the idea, of either using the pruning hook, or holding the branch for its excision from the vine? Have you a conscience, a heart, which will allow you to perform the uncharitable, the "fratricidal deed," or in any way to be accessory to it! The good opinion which I have both of your head and heart, will not allow me to harbour so dishonorable a suspicion of you. You will not, you *cannot* thus set at nought a beloved brother and faithful fellow labourer. Were you to commit this "wounding deed," or in any way give it countenance, how would you be able to justify it to the world, or to your own conscience? What vindication of your conduct could you make to the great head of the church, and before the Judge of all? These are very serious and solemn questions—as such, I am persuaded, you will consider and feel them. Nor can I doubt that they will duly affect your mind, and direct your conduct.

"But my brother dissents from the orthodox creed respecting the "Sacred Trinity" in several respects." Is not this so important a doctrine, as to render the denial of it a sufficient ground for withholding from him ministerial intercourse and fellowship? I will suppose, my dear Sir, that you propose this question, not so much with a view to your own satisfaction, as to that of some of your christian friends.

In what manner to shape an answer to the query, I am not a little at a loss, as the doctrine of the "Trinity"

seems to admit of no *distinct definition* or *intelligible explanation*. Modern Trinitarians (so called) seem very widely to differ in sentiment, and to adopt widely different theories in relation to the subject. Some christians of this denomination suppose, if I mistake not their ideas, that God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are *three distinct beings, or personal agents*, each self-existent, independent, eternal, and equal to the others "in power and glory;" and yet that they are so mysteriously united, as to constitute but *one God*. Others suppose that the *one God* exists in *three persons*, co-equal and co-eternal. Others suppose that the one God is styled Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, on account of his possessing *three distinct offices*, and discharging their *appropriate agencies*. Others suppose that the one God is styled Father, Son, and Spirit on account of his "*understanding, willing, and loving himself*;" or on account of his *wisdom, power and love*." Others maintain *one self-existent*, and *two dependent beings*, and yet assert that the two latter, are so united to and inhabited by the former, that by virtue of that union, divine perfections may be ascribed, and divine worship paid to them.

These are the principal, though not all the theories respecting the Trinity, adopted by modern Trinitarians. I say modern, for ancient Trinitarians would have rejected several of them as *grossly heretical*. But notwithstanding christians of this denomination thus widely differ in opinion, they agree generally in vindicating the word *Trinity*; they agree also in admitting that this word, or the doctrine to which it relates, is an *inexplicable mystery*; and generally they agree, it is believed, in the use of doxologies like the following—To the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit be *equal and undivided honours*. To *three persons in one God* be ascriptions of everlasting praise. To the *Three-one God*, the *Triune God*, the *Sacred Triad*, be all honour, power and dominion for ever.

My design in stating these different and clashing Trinitarian theories is not to perplex your mind, or to

impose upon you the difficult task of reconciling them with each other ; nor to ask, whether either of them has the approbation of your own judgment as correct. But my view in making these statements is to explain the observation, which I just now made, that I am at a loss in what manner to shape an answer to your query. It is not only difficult, but impracticable to decide, whether ministerial intercourse and fellowship is to be with-holden from a christian brother for dissenting from the orthodox creed respecting the Trinity, until the question, in what does that creed consist, shall be *fairly settled*. At present I am, utterly unable to decide the question. Trinitarianism is a doctrine, so unsettled, so ambiguous, that I know not what are the sentiments of a christian brother, with respect to the subject, when he says "I am a Trinitarian, or I believe in the doctrine of the Trinity." Such a declaration scarcely furnishes ground even for *conjecture*, as to his *real sentiments*. Although this declaration, as a "*Shibboleth*," may screen him from the imputation of *heresy*, it expresses nothing which is definite or intelligible. Because then Mr. — does not avail himself of this *Shibboleth*, does it certainly follow that he has forfeited his claim to ministerial intercourse and fellowship with his brethren ? I cannot for a moment hesitate to answer in the negative. Nor can I think that you will be dissatisfied with this answer. But were he to deny God as the *Father of Jesus Christ*, and Jesus Christ as the *Son of God*, and the Holy Spirit as the *Comforter*, and as *reproving the world of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment*, you would not, it is presumed, hesitate to renounce him as a christian brother. His heresy would be too flagrant to admit of excuse or palliation ; and well might he be considered as forfeiting all claim to your ministerial fellowship. But does Mr. — deny, or even question *either* of these great and important truths ? Does he not explicitly avow his belief in them, and strenuously defend them ? In what then does his heresy consist, to render him worthy of censure and excision from ministerial intercourse and fel-

lowship with the members of your association? Does it consist in *his declining the use of unscriptural words and phrases, and adhering more strictly than some of his brethren to scriptural phraseology?* But am I not wandering from the subject in taking too wide a range? You observe that Mr. — has very greatly grieved and offended his associated brethren, by avowing it as his belief, that Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God, is a being or intelligent agent distinct from his Father, and therefore that he cannot be the self-existent and independent Jehovah," &c. Whether all the sentiments of our offending brother relative to this subject be correct, I shall not undertake peremptorily to decide. My knowledge of them is not sufficient perhaps to justify such a decision. Such, however, is my acquaintance with Mr. — and his theory in relation to the subject, as to induce the belief that your statement of his sentiments, so far as it goes, is correct. He acknowledges Jesus Christ, as the only begotten Son of God. In doing this he has occasioned, it is presumed, no grief or offence to his brethren, as they undoubtedly acknowledge the same, and as a truth worthy of all acceptance. He avows it as his belief also, that Jesus Christ is a being distinct from his Father. And do not many of his Trinitarian brethren seem to avow the same belief, either *wholly*, or in *part*? Do they not allow that he is a *being or intelligent agent* distinct from his Father, although they admit that by virtue of some mysterious and unintelligible union with his Father, it is proper to view and speak of him as the self-existent God? Others, and indeed Trinitarian christians generally, it is believed, admit and maintain that Jesus Christ is a *person* distinct from his Father, and so distinct as to make it improper to view and speak of him as the *same person*. Is Mr. — then to be deemed so highly censurable as to deserve separation from the fellowship of his Trinitarian brethren, because he believes that *two* distinct beings or intelligent agents cannot be so united as to become *one* being or intelligent agent? Is it not very difficult to conceive of such a union as this suppos-

ed union ? Or do we find unquestionable evidence that this union between Christ and his Father is a scriptural fact ? Or is Mr. — to be deemed so highly censurable, because, while he admits with the members of his association, that Jesus Christ is a person distinct from his Father, he allows that *person* and *intelligent being* are of similar import ? But is it certain that his view of this subject is incorrect ? Does not the word *person*, when used in its proper sense, always signify, whether in the Bible or in other writings, an *intelligent being or agent* ? And if this be not the meaning of the word, when applied to Christ, *what meaning or idea does it convey* ? A candid and careful examination of this subject may possibly furnish convictive evidence that the sentiments of Mr. — in relation to this subject, are more correct and more scriptural, than many seem to imagine. If no evidence is, or can be produced to prove that *person* and *intelligent being* import essentially different things or ideas, why may it not safely be admitted that they are of *synonymous signification* ? There is nothing it should seem very hazardous or alarming to the cause of truth in admitting this. Is it not difficult then, to conceive that by admitting it, any one should incur the imputation of heresy, dangerous heresy, and heresy deserving the severest censure ! But let it be admitted as a doubtful question, whether *person* and *intelligent being* convey the same idea, yet as it is so natural to affix the same meaning or idea to both, and as the scriptures seem so strongly to favour it, must it not savour too much of an uncandid and uncharitable spirit severely to censure a brother for advocating the affirmative of the question ?

Let it also be admitted as a doubtful question, whether Jesus Christ possess a being or intelligent existence in distinction from his Father. Yet is Mr. — to be considered as unworthy of your christian fellowship, because he avows it as his belief, that the affirmative of the question is true ? Does not the Bible seem to furnish much evidence in support of the truth of this sentiment ? In this blessed book no doctrine is

more fully and explicitly revealed, than that Jesus Christ is the son of God, and the only begotten Son of God. But does not this important truth seem to furnish evidence, that Jesus Christ is a being distinct from God—that *God whose son he is* ? Have we not much reason to believe that in every case, *without exception*, son implies a *father*, and that he is truly and properly *distinct* from his father ? and does it not seem rational to conclude, that *he, who is begotten*, is equally distinct from *him, by whom* he is begotten ? Jesus Christ is styled *Son of Man*, *Son and offspring of David*. But are these names or appellations ever applied to the one God ? Would it not be very improper thus to apply them ? Is it not highly probable then, from this circumstance, that Jesus Christ is a being or intelligent agent distinct from the one God ? Jesus Christ is the *Mediator*, the *one* Mediator between God and men ; he is our *intercessor* and *advocate* with the Father. But is he the mediator, the intercessor, the advocate, between *himself* and men ? If not, this circumstance, it should seem, furnishes evidence, that he is a distinct being from God the Father. He is the prophet, whom God raised up like unto Moses ; as the Son of God he was made a priest, our great high priest, and he is a king, to whom God appointed a kingdom. But if Jesus Christ, as a prophet, like Moses, was *raised up by God his Father* ; if he was *made or constituted* our great high priest, and as a king had a kingdom *appointed him*, does it not seem that he must be an intelligent agent or being distinct from the One God, his Father ? Is it not difficult to conceive, that he who raises, and he who is raised up ; and that he who makes or constitutes, and he who is made or constituted, are one and the same being ; or that he who, as king, has a kingdom appointed or given him, is the same being with him, by whom the kingdom is appointed or given ? Besides, Christ as king is hereafter to give up the kingdom, appointed him, to his Father, that God may be all in all. But is it not difficult to conceive that Christ should give up this kingdom to *himself*, in giving it up to *his father* ? In this transaction does not

the idea seem to be conveyed, that Jesus Christ is strictly a being or intelligent agent distinct from God his Father ? And does not the same distinction seem to be brought into view by the circumstance, that Jesus Christ is *ordained of God* to be the judge of quick and dead ? If God ordained his Son to the discharge of this great and important office, does it not seem that he must be an intelligent being or agent distinct from God, by whom he was ordained ? If he were not possessed of intelligence how could he be qualified to judge the world, and if he do not possess a *distinct intelligence* from the intelligence of his Father, how could he be *ordained* of his Father to *execute this commission* ? Is it not difficult to conceive that an intelligent being should *ordain himself* to the execution of an office !

In addition to the foregoing observations, permit me to observe, that Jesus Christ is represented as having *proceeded forth*, and *come from God his Father* ; as having *come down from heaven* ; and as having *ascended up again to heaven*, where he had been *before*, even to *his Father and his God*. Do you, my dear Sir, find no difficulty in applying these representations to the one God, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ ? Would there not be a manifest impropriety in this ? But why an impropriety ? Would not the application be strictly proper, if Jesus Christ were the same being or intelligent agent with his Father ?

Let me further ask, would it be proper, would it be agreeable to truth to speak of the self-existent and immutable God, as having *been born*, as having *been a child and son*, as having *suffered and died* upon the cross ? and as having *been buried and raised again from the dead* ! Perhaps you are shocked with these interrogations. They may seem to savour of great irreverence and impiety. And I confess, that in stating them, my soul recoils, and my pen with reluctance traces them on the paper before me. Nor could I have persuaded myself to state them, were it not that some, and I know not but many of my fellow christians, seem to think and to speak thus of that self-existent

and eternal being, with whom there is no variation nor shadow of change! And why should they not think and speak thus of him, if he be not a being distinct from Jesus Christ? Is it not difficult to assign a satisfactory or even an *intelligible* reason! If Jesus Christ be the self-existent and unchangeable God, may not the same things be said, with strict propriety, of the unchangeable God, as of Jesus Christ? I pray you, Sir, very seriously to consider this question, and may we both be led to a just solution of it.

Perhaps you will say, "that the representations of Jesus Christ as above stated, and others of a similar nature, relate to his *lowest character*, or to his character *as man*, and not to his character as the *self-existent and independent God*." That these representations do not relate or apply to Jesus Christ, as the self-existent and independent God, will readily be admitted; for such representations seem entirely incompatible with self-existence and independence. But is it certain that the character of *self-existence* and *independence belongs to Jesus Christ*? If this be really the case, he must be the one God besides whom there is no other. This, I think, you will readily acknowledge, as I am persuaded you do not believe in the existence of more than one self-existent and independent God. But can it be correct or consistent with truth, to speak of this *one God* as possessing *two characters* or natures, *one as strictly and independently divine*, and the *other as human or created*, consisting of a "true body and reasonable soul." I cannot think, my dear Sir, that you will admit this; can it then be correct and consistent with truth, to apply the above representations to Jesus Christ, on the supposition that he is the *one God* or the *only self-existent being*? Must not the question be answered in the negative, on supposition that the one God or self-existent being do not possess a human nature, consisting of a "true body and reasonable soul?" I think, Sir, that you must see the pertinency and feel and acknowledge the force of these queries. And will you not admit that they suggest

strong reasons to induce the belief, that Jesus Christ is *not* the self-existent and independent God."

In this connexion permit me to ask, whether the above representations of Jesus Christ, and others of a similar kind, suggest the idea that *he* ever possessed "two distinct natures in one person," the one divine and the other human, or that he was a complex person or being, aside from a union between *soul* and *body*? Is it certain that he is spoken of as *child*, as *man*, *son of man*, &c. on any *other consideration* than that he was *made flesh*, appeared in the *likeness of sinful flesh*, and was found in *fashion as a man*? Because he is thus denominated, are we to suppose that he possessed a human soul like ours, which had no real existence till the time of its incarnation, in the reign of Augustus Cæsar! or that he was truly man, like other men, sin only excepted? This, I am sensible, is by many admitted and advocated, as a doctrine of the highest importance. But have we sufficient evidence that this is indeed the case? You must be sensible that Jesus Christ, as *a child*, has names and titles given him of that high and extraordinary import, which seem totally inconsistent with the idea, that he possessed that kind of humanity or human nature, which many with so much zeal contend for. By our Trinitarian brethren it is urged, that the titles *mighty God* and *everlasting Father* in their strictest sense and highest import are applied to the "child Jesus." But if this be true, can Jesus Christ *as child* be a human or created being! It may however be very reasonably questioned, to say the least, whether these titles as applied to the child Jesus import, as many plead that he *is*, the mighty God, the self-existent Jehovah, and the Father of eternity. The prophet does not say this; nor did he intend to convey, it is believed, such a meaning. The correct rendering of the titles or names by which the child Jesus was to be called, is by good judges thought to be this—*Mighty, God*, the *Father of the everlasting age*; that age or dispensation which is to endure to the consummation of things; the *age of the gospel*; concerning which the apostle declares that to

Christ only and not to angels, hath God *put in subjection this age to come*. This rendering is probably correct. But is not the title or name, *the Father of the everlasting age*, too magnificent, of too high import, to be applied to *humanity* or a created being, whose existence commenced about eighteen centuries past? Is not Jesus Christ *as man*, the *root* as well as the offspring of David? Is he not, in *this character*, the *mediator* between God and men? "Unto us there is but one God and one mediator between God and men, the *man* Christ Jesus." Is not the *mediator*, the *man* Christ Jesus? Do not these several appellations designate the same person or being? But is the mediator, Christ Jesus, a *mere man*? You must also be sensible that Jesus Christ, as the *son of man*, is represented as the object of *faith*, as having *power to forgive sins*; as the *Lord of the sabbath*; as that being, who is the *Lord of angels*; as *saving lost men*; as having *been in heaven*, while he *was upon earth*; as having *authority to execute judgment*, and as that being, who shall, at the time appointed, come to *judge the world* accompanied with the angels; and that he shall then sit upon the *throne of his glory*, and shall say to them on his right hand, come ye blessed of my Father, &c. All these things are said of *Jesus Christ* as the *son of man*. But what more can be said of him in any supposed *higher character*? Must not *son of man* then, as applied to Christ, designate his *true character*? But does this character imply nothing more than that of a person or being, whose existence commenced *eighteen centuries past*? Where then is the evidence that Jesus Christ is truly man, like other men, sin only excepted? Have we not indeed much evidence to believe that he is represented *as child, man, son of man*, &c. *merely* on account of his having united himself to a *human body*, and appearing in the form or *likeness of a man*? And does not the truth of this suggestion seem to be confirmed from the consideration, that when *angels* appeared in human form they are spoken of as *men*? Also from the consideration

that a *body* is spoken of as having been *prepared* for Christ; that he was *made flesh*, and that he *partook*, in common with mankind, of *flesh and blood*, that he might be made *like* unto his brethren. Do not these representations seem clearly to convey the idea, that Jesus Christ never possessed any other *complex character*, than that which arises from the *union of soul with body*? But did the soul of Jesus Christ begin to exist in the reign of Augustus Cæsar? Was it a human or created soul like ours? This I think cannot reasonably be pretended, and especially when it is considered that according to Bible representation, Jesus Christ, *as to his soul*, existed *before Abraham*, that he was in the *beginning* with God his Father, that he existed *before the foundation of the world*, and was the *first born of every creature*. These representations seem by no means compatible with the idea, that the soul of Jesus Christ did not exist before his body. But did he possess any *other soul* than this? To assert that he did, does not amount to proof; nor can mere assertion possess much weight in the estimation of the considerate and reflecting mind.

And now, my dear Sir, let me ask, whether you find sufficient evidence, either from reason or revelation, that Jesus Christ is *truly man*, and *truly the self-existent and independent God*? Or do you find satisfactory evidence that *either* of these characters belong to him? That he is not man, in the sense before explained, much evidence, it is believed, has been exhibited. And has not much evidence also been exhibited, that he is not the one, the self-existent God? That this evidence, however, will not be satisfactory and conclusive to the minds of some of my christian brethren, I am prepared to believe. And that there are no representations of Jesus Christ in the Bible, which *seem* to favour the idea that he is the self-existent and independent God, I would by no means deny; for if there be no such representations in the Bible, it is difficult to conceive that the sentiment should, by so many christians, be admitted, and embraced as true. But whether this *seeming evidence*

possess that weight and strength, which many ascribe to it, is a question which has a claim to the most serious and impartial consideration.

It has been urged, and not unfrequently, "that the same titles, attributes and works are ascribed in the Bible to Jesus Christ, as to the self-existent and independent God." Hence it has been inferred, that Jesus Christ is none other than the self-existent and independent God. And this inference, it should seem, ought to be admitted as correct, if the position from which it is drawn be unquestionably true. But has the position ever been substantiated? *It certainly has not*, and should it be added, that it *cannot be substantiated*, none but the words of truth and soberness would be spoken. That this, Sir, is not mere assertion, with confidence I appeal to a judge, the correctness of whose decision is not to be questioned—"to the law and testimony."

To Jesus Christ, the title of *God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ* is never given in the sacred volume. Should it be said, that on supposition Jesus Christ be the self-existent God, it would be improper to give him this title, permit me to ask, why would it be improper, admitting this supposition to be true? If Jesus Christ be the self-existent God, or that very being who is called his Father, it is not easy to conceive that there would be any impropriety in speaking of him, as the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. But as it will probably be admitted by all, that it would be highly improper thus to speak of the Son of God, does not *this circumstance* furnish evidence, that the Son of God is not the *same being* as his Father?

"There is one God, and none other but he." But Jesus Christ is never styled *the one God*, beside whom there is none other. This one God is the "only true God," but this title is *never applied to Jesus Christ*. The self-existent and independent God, is the "eternal God, the king eternal, immortal, and invisible." He "only hath immortality," is the "only Potentate," and "the only wise God." He is the "high God,

the most high God, the holy God, the God of heaven and the God of hosts." But are *these titles*, or any of them, ever applied to Jesus Christ? *It is believed they are not.* The self-existent God is the "God of Israel, the living God, God alone," besides whom there is "none else, and the Father of all and above all." But Jesus Christ is *never so represented in the Bible.* The self-existent God is designated in the Bible by a variety of other titles, which are not applied to Jesus Christ; but it were needless particularly to notice them. Instead of urging then, that *all the titles*, by which the one God is known, are applied to Jesus Christ, is it not more conformable to truth to say, that *but few of them* are thus applied, and that those titles, which are *common to them both*, are but *seldom*, comparatively, applied to Jesus Christ? Is it not true also, that when they are applied to him, the application is generally, if not always, made in such a manner, as to *designate him as a being distinct from the one God, his Father?*

Nor is it to be admitted that all the attributes or perfections of the one and only supreme God, are ascribed to Jesus Christ. To the one God belong the attributes or perfections of *self existence, independence, omnipotence, omnipresence, omniscience, infinite knowledge, wisdom and goodness.* This will by none be questioned. But is it unquestionably true that *all*, or *any* of these attributes or perfections are, in the Bible, ascribed to Jesus Christ? Although *some* of them may at *first view seem* to be ascribed to him in several passages of that sacred volume, yet by a careful examination of these passages, it will probably appear that this is *not really* the case. If, my dear Sir, you have not carefully examined this subject, and expressly with a view to obtain satisfaction to your own mind, permit me to request that you will thus examine it. The examination will probably afford you much relief and satisfaction.

That such titles and perfections, however, as seem utterly inconsistent with the idea that he never existed before he was born of the virgin Mary, are ascribed

to Jesus Christ, is a truth readily admitted. But for these titles and perfections is he not represented as *dependent on the one God, his Father*? God, even *his* God, *gave him* names, or a name, which is above every name of men, or of angels; he *gave him* also all power in heaven and in earth, by or through which he wrought wonderful and miraculous works, and even made the worlds. By his Father he was *exalted* to be a prince and a Saviour, and *made* both Lord and Christ. By his Father the Spirit was *given* him not by measure, or in a stinted manner, but in an eminent and peculiarly high degree. By his Father he was *exalted* to a kingdom, a kingdom not of this world, a kingdom which he is hereafter to deliver up to his Father, that God may be all in all. His father *gave* him to have life in himself, and authority to execute judgment as judge of quick and dead. Such is the representation made in the word of truth, respecting the titles and perfections of Jesus Christ. And did not Jesus Christ himself, in the course of his ministry on earth, *always acknowledge his dependence upon his Father* for the titles and perfections, which are ascribed to him; and that of *his own self he did nothing*! Although the work of creation is ascribed to Jesus Christ, yet we are assured, and in the most unequivocal manner, that he who built all things is God, and that *he made* the worlds *by or through* his Son Jesus Christ. But did Jesus Christ make the worlds otherwise than as the *agent* of the supreme Father? Or would it be proper to speak or think of Jesus Christ as having *made the worlds by or through his Father*? Who does not see and feel that this would be highly improper! Can it reasonably be admitted then, that he is the same being with his Father, or that he is the self-existent and independent God!

In the view of these things let it be asked—are *all* the titles, and perfections, and works, which are ascribed in the scriptures of truth to the one God, the Father of all, and who is above all, ascribed also to Jesus Christ? This by some is with much confidence asserted; and believed, probably, by many, *on the au-*

thority of this assertion. But with equal confidence it is denied; and it is believed that this denial has the sanction of that tribunal from which no appeal is to be made. Whether the assertion, or denial, rests *on the best foundation*, and has *the best claim to belief*, you will now, Sir, decide for yourself. What your decision will be, I can scarcely entertain a doubt.

Perhaps you would wish to ask in this place, “whether, on supposition Jesus Christ be an intelligent agent or being distinct from his Father, he is not *equal* with his Father!” That there is much scriptural evidence that Jesus Christ is an intelligent agent or being distinct from the One God, his Father, cannot, in my opinion, reasonably be denied. Can it reasonably be admitted then that he is *equal* with his Father? In admitting this, should we not acknowledge the existence of *two self-existent and independent Gods*? This conclusion I am persuaded can never be fairly obviated, or evaded. But if we are not to acknowledge the existence of two such Gods, it must follow, it should seem, that Jesus Christ is not to be acknowledged as a being, strictly speaking, equal with his Father. It can never be proved, nor is there any reason to believe, that any two intelligent beings or agents in the universe, are, in all respects, equal one to the other. It is indeed impossible that this should be the case. I am not unmindful, however, that according to the common version of the Bible, Jesus Christ is said to have thought it not robbery to be *equal* with God. But this version you probably know is considered, by many divines of the most critical and extensive knowledge in the Greek language, as very foreign in its import from the original. And this, it is highly probable, is really the case. But should the version be admitted as correct, it is to be remembered that the word *equal*, as generally used in scripture in relation to intelligent beings or agents, *never* expresses strict equality, or equality in all respects. That this is indeed the case, a slight examination of the subject, will be sufficient to satisfy your mind. It will readily occur to your mind, that David, king of Israel, speaks of

one of his subjects, probably Ahithophel, as his "equal;" that our Saviour speaks of saints in heaven as "equal unto the angels," and that the apostle Paul says, that "he profited *above* many of his equals." You must be sensible that in neither of these examples, the word *equal* imports *precise equality*; nor does the word ever convey this idea, in relation to man and man, or to man and angel. Why then should the word *equal*, in reference to Jesus Christ and God his Father, be considered as expressive of strict equality? and especially when such equality seems so evidently repugnant to every dictate of enlightened reason?

But if Jesus Christ does not claim strict equality with his Father in the passage above alluded to, what shall we say of those passages in which he in the most *unequivocal* terms *disclaims* it? You cannot be insensible, Sir, that he expressly declares, that his Father is *greater than he*, and is *greater than all*; that of himself he *can do nothing*; that he speaks and does as his Father *gives him commandment*, and that no one, *not even himself*, knoweth of that day, (probably the day of the general judgment) except his Father. Do not these declarations seem very clearly to convey the idea, that Jesus Christ *neither does possess nor claim* strict equality with his Father? Of what avail will it be to say that Christ disclaimed the knowledge of the day of judgment, considered as *a man, a mere man*? Before this plea can be of any avail, it must be made to appear that he really possessed *such a character*. But has any satisfactory evidence ever been produced to substantiate this supposition or sentiment? To my mind no such evidence has been produced. Besides, can it reasonably be supposed that Jesus Christ, in whose mouth guile was never found, would have said that his Father was greater than he, and that he knew not when the day of judgment would take place, &c. when these declarations were *not true*, or when they were *untrue in a very important sense*? Or can we suppose that he meant to be understood to convey the idea, that the things which he said were *both true and*

untrue, or that they were true in *one sense*, and that in *another sense* they were not true. Ought we not, my dear Sir, to be extremely cautious in admitting this! Indeed, can we be justified in admitting it, without the *strongest necessity for it*? But no such necessity, it is believed, exists. Let it be further observed, as worthy of special consideration, that Christ does not say, or even *intimate*, that he knew not the time of the general judgment *as man*, but that he knew it not as “the Son,” *the Son of the Father*. In fine, is there not something so unnatural, and so incongruous in the idea, that Christ should say that his Father was greater than he, *considered as a mere man*, as to render it almost impossible to admit that this was the instruction which he meant to convey! These are considerations, my brother, worthy of our most deliberate and serious consideration.

But if Jesus Christ be neither the self-existent and independent God, nor equal to him, “with what propriety,” you may perhaps ask, “could he have said that *he and his father were one*?”—Neither the truth nor the propriety, Sir, of this declaration, is to be questioned. It was made by the faithful and true witness. But what is the truth or sentiment, which it was intended to convey? Are we to understand Christ as having said, that he and his Father were *one person*? This, I presume, neither you, nor any of your associated brethren, will admit. Or did he mean to suggest the idea, that he and his Father were *one being*? But will any scriptural example or analogy justify such a construction? *none*, it is confidently believed. Because husband and wife, according to scriptural representation, are *one flesh*, are we to admit they are *one body*? because he that planteth and he that watereth are *one*, does it follow that Paul and Apollos were *one person or man*? Or because christians in common, or as a body, are *one* in Christ Jesus, will any be likely to believe that they are all *one person*, or *intelligent being*? Why then should it be inferred that the oneness between the Son of God and his Father, is a *oneness of being*? How can it be sup-

posed that Christ meant to convey such an idea, and especially as he has *very clearly intimated that no such idea was meant to be conveyed!* In solemn prayer we find him thus addressing his Father, "Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given *me*, that they may be *one*, as *we are* ; that they also may be *one in us*." Now if christians, or they who were given to Christ, are, or may be one, as *Christ is one with his Father* ; and if they are or may be *one, both in the Father and the Son*, does it not appear evident beyond all reasonable contradiction, that he is not one being or intelligent agent in his Father ! Christians are all one ; and they are *one in like manner* as Christ and his Father *are one*. But christians are not one being or intelligent agent. Can the consequence then be denied, that Christ and his Father are *not one being or intelligent agent!* That they are one in affection, design and pursuit is a truth easy to be understood, and worthy of our ready and joyful belief. And is not this the oneness of which Christ speaks ? It is surely difficult to conceive of *any other of a different import*.

"But Jesus Christ," you will perhaps say, "is the object of prayer and of religious worship. But how can this be reconciled with the idea, that he is not the self-existent God !" If Jesus Christ be the object of prayer, *as the self-existent God*, it is very obvious that he is no other being than the self-existent God. But is Jesus Christ ever exhibited to our view in this light ? Did he, while on earth, ever claim the homage of prayer and worship, as if he were the supreme God ? This most surely cannot be urged. He taught his disciples to pray, *not to himself*, but *to his Father*, and inculcated this duty by *his own example*. And we are expressly taught to pray, and to give thanks to the supreme Father, *in the name, or through his Son, Jesus Christ* ; but we are never expressly taught to direct our prayers to Jesus Christ. Nor have we any example in the Bible of prayer, in the strict sense of the word, having been made to Jesus Christ. The

examples of Thomas and Stephen are not to be considered as proof, at least not as proof that they prayed to him, as the supreme God. Indeed we have *no evidence*, that either Thomas or Stephen ever viewed him as possessing this character. They viewed him as the promised Messiah, who they expected would deliver their nation from the bondage of the Roman emperor, and establish himself as their king. Whether they entertained higher ideas of Christ, is far from being certain. That they did not previously to his resurrection, is highly probable. But admitting that they entertained higher views of his character, it by no means follows that they considered him as the self-existent God, or prayed to him as such. I have said that we have *no evidence* of this. But as the expression may be considered as too strong, I will only say, that, in my opinion, we have no evidence of it, which ought to be considered as conclusive, or even weighty. That Jesus Christ, however, is to be considered as an object of prayer and religious worship, *in a qualified sense*, is a truth which I readily admit. Jesus Christ is an extraordinary messenger from God his Father ; is invested with high and extensive authority ; clothed with all power in heaven and in earth, and entrusted with all judgment. *In this character he has a just claim to homage and worship.* By honouring the Son, in this character, we honour the Father. But would it not be an invasion of his Father's rights, to give him the same honour and worship, as to his Father ? To the Father only is supreme and unrivalled honour and worship due, as that being, who alone possesses undivided existence, unlimited perfections, and absolute dominion. Nor is the honour or worship paid to Christ, either by angels or men, to be considered, strictly speaking, as *terminating on him, but as passing over to the Supreme Father.* Agreeably we read, "that God hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name ; that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth ; and that every

tongue should confess, that Jesus Christ is Lord, *to the glory of God the Father.*"

Will you say, my dear Sir, that to honour and worship Christ must be *idoltry*, if he be not the self-existent and independent Jehovah? While this is by many said in a very confident and peremptory manner, yet it is to be remembered, that to honour or worship Jesus Christ as the Son of God and constituted Lord of angels and men, *is the command of God his Father. But can obedience to the divine command be an idolatrous service?* We most certainly ought rather to obey God, than to *hearken unto men*; nor should we ever decline to obey his command, from an apprehension that we shall be guilty of idolatry by obeying it. To honour or worship Jesus Christ as that being, to whom God, even his God, hath given a name which is above every name or dignity of human or created beings, is not only a most reasonable service, but *an indispensable duty*. Nor in doing this shall we derogate from the honour, either of the Father, or the Son. But to honour or worship Jesus Christ, as the self-existent and independent God, or as if he were the same being as his Father, must be either to honour the Father *to the exclusion of all honour from the Son*; or to honour the Son *to the exclusion of all honour from the Father*; or to honour *two beings as supreme Gods*. I see not but one of these conclusions *must inevitably be admitted as true*. But is it safe or agreeable to truth to admit *either of them*? You will decide for yourself.

Should you ask, "how great is the honour, or how high is the worship which we are to give to Christ?" the answer is, *it must be proportionate to the dignity of his character, to our advantages for knowing what his true character is, and to our intellectual and moral powers or faculties.*

"But Jesus Christ is called God, the mighty God and everlasting Father, he is spoken of as the brightness of the Father's glory, and the express image of his person; and as filled with all the fulness of the Godhead." Will you urge these representations, Sir, as furnishing evidence that Jesus Christ is the one, the

self-existent and independent God? They often have been urged as furnishing conclusive evidence. But that this supposed evidence should be satisfactory to any considerate and reflecting mind, is not easy to be accounted for. Does the name *God* necessarily convey the idea of *absolute supremacy, or of self-existence or independence*? If so, then magistrates, or men of distinction, are supreme, self-existent and independent beings; for they are spoken of and acknowledged *as Gods*, and by the God of heaven. Do you insist, that *mighty God* and *Everlasting Father* are names applied to Jesus Christ, and that they are expressive of self-existence and independence? But should this be admitted must it not follow, that *the child who was born in Bethlehem—the son who was given*, is a self-existent and independent being? I see not how this consequence can be refuted, or reasonably opposed. But, my dear Sir, was the self-existent and independent God ever *born*—was he ever a *child*—was he ever a *son*, who was *given* or *sent* into the world? Will you admit this? I think you will not. How then can you admit that Jesus Christ is the self-existent and independent God; for Jesus Christ was *this child—this son*. Nor could his *real character* or *nature* have been *altered*, on account of any names or titles which were *given him*. Because all the fulness of God dwelt, or dwells in Jesus Christ, does it certainly follow that he is the one God, besides whom there is none other, self-existent and independent? If so, must it not be admitted that *christians* have a claim to this character? For they are represented as *filled, or capable of being filled with all the fulness of God*. “That ye might be filled with all the fulness of God.” And who can reasonably plead, that because Jesus Christ is the brightness of the Father’s glory and the express image of his person, that he is the same being with his Father? Is the *image* of the invisible God, however bright or express, that *very God* whom the *image resembles*?

The above representations of Jesus Christ, and some others which occur in the Bible, it is readily ad-

mitted, as a truth worthy of all acceptance, furnish evidence, that he is a being highly exalted and illustrious ; that he is exalted above all principalities and powers, and that he is to be acknowledged and worshipped as such, to the glory of God the Father. Nor is it easy to conceive that they can be reconciled with the idea, that he is a man, like other men, sin only excepted. To admit that this is the character of Christ, or belongs to Christ, would be to place him in a state of degradation, in which, I conceive, he is never placed in the sacred volume.

I have now, Sir, given you my leading thoughts in relation to articles of faith, drawn up in other than words of scripture, as tests of orthodoxy, and as forming a bond of union to christian churches and ministerial associations. I have also suggested several thoughts respecting what is called the doctrine of the Trinity, and particularly respecting the character of Jesus Christ, the son of God. How far they will meet your approbation, or influence your judgment or conduct, I have yet to learn. Neither of the subjects, I am sensible, has been thoroughly investigated, nor would such investigation be consistent with the limits by which I contemplated to confine myself. These limits I have already and greatly passed, and have, I fear, not a little trespassed on your time and patience. What are my sentiments relative to articles of faith, considered as tests, you must readily perceive. You must also perceive, that, in my estimation, the Bible furnishes much evidence, that Jesus Christ is a being or intelligent agent *distinct* from God his Father, and therefore that he cannot be either the self-existent God, or strictly equal to the self-existent God. You must perceive also, that I disclaim the idea that he is a man, who never existed till he was born of the virgin Mary ; and advocate the sentiment that he is the first born of every creature, as having existed before creation, and that God the Father made the worlds by or through him.

In producing from the scriptures of truth what appears to me to be strong, if not conclusive evidence,

in support of these sentiments, I considered it needless to refer you to the books, chapters and verses, from which the evidence was produced, persuaded that you would neither question my integrity, nor be at a loss to distinguish such evidence, as has the stamp of scriptural authority, from that which does not possess this authority. I have sometimes but barely alluded to scripture texts, and it is not unlikely that I have sometimes quoted texts with some verbal inaccuracy. But knowingly and with design I have in no instance perverted scriptural authorities. Nor to any text, which I have quoted, have I endeavoured to give a deceptive colouring or specious gloss. I can truly say that it has been very far from my design to make any text of scripture speak more or less, than its natural and most obvious language imports. Nor can I, my dear Sir, entertain a suspicion, that you will question my integrity in making this declaration. But whether I have, in any measure, done justice to the subject which I have considered, or whether the use I have made of scriptural texts, in relation to ~~him~~, has been pertinent, correct, and illustrative, you will judge for yourself.

That the scriptures furnish us with sufficient light to know God and Jesus Christ, whom he sent into the world, is a truth which, by all, will readily be admitted; yet it is a truth too obvious to be denied, that christians, in every period of the christian dispensation, have entertained different ideas of the character both of the Father and the Son, especially of the Son. Hence the most unhappy animosities, mutual crimination and recrimination, severe and acrimonious censures, and the most unchristian and cruel persecutions and matrydoms have arisen. In how many thousands of instances have the professors of our common christianity, in the most unfeeling and relentless manner, butchered each other, and for no other reason than because they have not harmonized in opinion respecting the character of the Son of God; or because they have refused subscriptions or assent to each other's religious formularies or articles of faith, fabri-

cated with words and phrases of human device, and not unfrequently with such words and phrases, as have been *confessedly unintelligible*. Thus has the beautiful and lovely visage of christianity been lamentably marred ! Thus has the mystical body of our glorious and benevolent Saviour been mangled, mutilated, and deformed ! Alas ! alas ! how humiliating the thought ! how painful the reflection !

But blessed be God that this bigotted, unhallowed, and antichristian spirit does not operate and rage with that heat and violence, as in past ages of the christian church ; yet is it far from being wholly suppressed. Its operation and its effects are but too visible at the present day. Is it not a sad truth, and a truth too evident to be disguised, that while many of our fellow christians avow their belief in the holy scriptures, as a revelation from heaven, and manifest for them the most profound reverence, they are viewed and treated by many others, either as *infidels*, or *destructively erroneous* in sentiments, because in their prayers they use *scriptural doxologies* in preference to those of *human device* ; because they *decline* subscription or assent to articles of faith, constructed by the words and phrases which men's wisdom inventeth, and because they cannot believe in what they *cannot understand*, and what their brethren acknowledge to be *an inexplicable mystery* ? Can conduct like this, my brother, be justifiable ? Can it be fairly vindicated ? Does it result from that spirit of the gospel which thinketh no evil, and which worketh no ill to a neighbour ? Or is it consistent with that unrivalled respect and reverence which should always be entertained and cherished for the Word of God ? Very serious and interesting is this inquiry. It claims the most serious and interested attention. This attention I am persuaded you will bestow upon the subject, and regulate your conduct accordingly.

Can I harbour the suspicion, Sir, that you will give your voice against your faithful brother, as unworthy of connection with your associated body, and as unworthy of your ministerial intercourse and fellowship ? I am persuaded better things of you. Has Mr. —

forfeited his character as a christian, or as a christian minister, by any immorality, or neglect of the duties of his office? This, neither you, nor your associated brethren pretend? Does he by any real or supposed error in opinion exhibit evidence that he is not a real christian? This you do not admit or believe. Are you *sure* that his view of the character of Christ is erroneous? I am persuaded you will not venture peremptorily to say it is.* But let it be admitted that his sentiments respecting the character of Jesus Christ are incorrect; yet are his errors of that magnitude, as to render him worthy of excision from your associated body and ministerial fellowship? Let us briefly review the subject.

Mr. ——— thinks, if I understand him, that there is little or no evidence from the Bible, that Jesus Christ is a man, who never existed till he was born of the virgin Mary. And is it not certain that this character is no where in the Bible ascribed to him? In a direct and explicit manner, you, I think, will readily allow it is not. On the other hand he thinks that the Bible furnishes little or no evidence that Jesus Christ is the one God, the self-existent Jehovah. And is it not true that the Bible never speaks of him as the one God, as God alone, beside whom there is none other, none else? Besides does not self-existence seem to be incompatible with the idea that he is a Son, and a begotten Son? He thinks also that no union exists between the infinite God and a man, which would make it proper to view or speak of that man as being the infinite God. And does it not seem that such a union must be impossible? Indeed he supposes that no two intelligent beings can be so united as to become one and the same being. But what is there in this sentiment which seems repugnant either to reason or scripture? He does not think that the Bible furnishes evidence that one God is three persons or beings, or that three persons or beings exist in or constitute one God. And it is certain that the Bible nev-

er makes such a statement. Nor does he believe that three persons or beings are co-eternal and co-equal one with the other in power and glory. But does the Bible in any place make such a statement? He believes that person and intelligent being or agent are words of the same import, or that person in the proper sense of the word is an intelligent being or agent, and distinct from every other intelligent being or agent. And does not the Bible always use the word person in this sense? And is not the word thus used in uninspired writings, and in our common conversation? He does not believe that the self-existent and immutable God was ever begotten or born, or that he was a son, or that he was ever poor, or that he suffered, died upon the cross, rose again from the dead, and ascended into heaven to any other being called his Father! And can it reasonably be pretended that the Bible ever makes such statements as these! Nor does he believe that a mere man, whose existence commenced in the reign of Augustus Cæsar, made an atonement for the sins of men. And will you say that the Bible teaches that the atonement was made by the sufferings and death of such a person? But Mr. ——— does believe, if I understand him, in the existence of one self-existent, independent, and infinitely perfect and glorious Being, and in the existence of but one such being; and that this being is the God as well as Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and that Jesus Christ is the Son of God; that he existed before Abraham, and in the beginning with God his Father, and that the Father by or through him made the worlds; that in due time he sent him into the world, that he was made flesh, by union to that body which was prepared for him, that he dwelt among men for more than thirty years; that he was the faithful and true witness; that he always spoke and did as he was taught by and received commandment from his Father; that the Father gave him the spirit not by measure, but in a preeminent degree, by which he wrought miracles; and that independent of God he did nothing. He believes also that Jesus

Christ has power to forgive sins, and that it was given him to have life in himself ; that he is the image of the invisible God, by whom he was constituted the only mediator between himself and men ; that through him we have access by one spirit unto the Father, and that prayer and giving of thanks to the Father are to be made in his name ! that he is the sole constituted law-giver and head of the church ; that God hath appointed him a kingdom, given him all power in heaven and in earth, ordained him to be judge of quick and dead, and that he hath highly exalted him and given him a name, which is above every name, that every knee should bow in his name, and every tongue confess him to be Lord to the glory of God the Father.

Such, I am persuaded, are the sentiments of Mr. — respecting the one God, and the one Lord Jesus Christ. And do not these sentiments seem correct ? Do they not seem to accord with Bible representation, and forcibly to recommend themselves to our understanding and belief ? But suppose them to be in some measure incorrect, yet can it reasonably be urged that the incorrectness is such, and so alarming and dangerous to the cause of truth, as to render your brother worthy of death, or of bonds, or of excision from the fellowship of his christian brethren, whose sentiments may be deemed more orthodox, according to the modern standard ? I say *modern standard*, because the standard of orthodoxy has ever been variable, in a greater or less degree, from the first establishment of human creeds and formularies to the present day, and because the sentiments of the christian church, generally, during the three first centuries, respecting the character of Jesus Christ widely differ from those, which have the name of orthodoxy at the present time. The sentiments of the christian church in relation to this subject, during its *purest ages*, so far as they can be collected from the best writers of those ages, were much more agreeable to the sentiments of Mr. — than to the sentiments of his aggrieved brethren. Is he then to be viewed and treated as a dangerous heretic, and as unworthy to receive the hand of christian fellowship ! My dear Sir,

I cannot contemplate the subject but with emotions of grief, and with apprehensions for the honour, and respect, and reverence which are due, and which should ever be cherished for the inspired scriptures; for the rights of conscience, freedom of religious inquiry, improvement in christian knowledge, and for that liberty, by which Christ has made his people free. Do not the signs of the times but too plainly indicate danger in *all these respects*? When articles of faith of human fabrication are set up as tests of orthodoxy; when subscription or assent to these articles is required, rather than subscription or assent to the holy scriptures, as a necessary prerequisite to admission into christian churches and ministerial associations; when a neglect to subscribe or assent to such articles exposes our christian brethren to unreasonable suspicion and reproach; when an adherence to scriptural ascriptions or doxologies is considered as an evidence of unsoundness of faith; when a preference of the words of scripture in speaking of the character of Christ to the words of human device seems to be considered as an indication of heresy; when the most solemn denunciations are made against those, who do not, because *they cannot*, believe in a *three one God*, as the most *irreligious characters*, and as in the most *dangerous situations*; when we are told, and in the most peremptory manner, that our everlasting salvation depends on *believing a mystery which is neither explained nor understood, and that if it were rendered intelligible to our minds, it would lose its excellence and become unworthy of our belief*; when ministerial associations and christian churches are excommunicating their brethren, who do not view these things in the light they *do*, or *seem* to view them; when things, my dear brother, have arisen to this crisis, is there not cause of alarm? Is it not time to speak, to “blow the trumpet in Zion, and to sound an alarm in the holy mountain?” Not however the trump of *war*, nor the blast of alarm, as if the church of Christ or the cause of truth were in danger of being destroyed. This church, blessed be God, is founded on the rock of ages,

nor will it ever be destroyed, although its beauty may for a time be defaced. Nor will the lamp of the gospel ever be extinguished, however it may be obscured. And that the sparks of divine truth, particularly in relation to the subjects on which I have addressed you, will soon be struck out by the collision of different sentiments, it is not only hoped, but confidently believed. Nor is it to be doubted that in due time these sparks will produce a flame of pure and steady light, which will effectually, or in a great measure, dissipate those clouds of darkness, which now cover so great a part of the christian world. In the confident and joyful expectation of this desirable event, in the hope that all unreasonable censures and unhal-
lowed animosities between christian brethren will soon subside, and presenting you, Sir, and my Trinitarian brethren, the hand of cordial fellowship, permit me to subscribe myself your sincere friend and fellow labourer in the gospel vineyard.

POSTSCRIPT.

Although I have written much more largely than I had contemplated, yet I by no means consider the subjects on which I have conveyed you my thoughts, as having been amply discussed. Should you, my dear Sir, be desirous of becoming more fully acquainted with my sentiments, I will, at a convenient season, communicate them to you by the loan of a manuscript, in which I have expressed them with more care and copiousness. As this communication has been made with considerable haste, and as I cannot conveniently transcribe it, you will have the goodness to excuse its inaccuracies.

I have in the preceding communication suggested the idea, that human creeds or articles of faith have been considered, in some respects, at least, as a better criterion or test of the soundness of a man's head and

the goodness of his heart, than the Bible itself. If this were not indeed the case, whence is it that such creeds or articles should, by so many, be zealously advocated, and highly recommended! Why should subscription or assent to them be required as necessary to admission into christian churches and ministerial associations? And whence is it that we find one of the most celebrated ~~classical~~ *classical* characters in the United States, on leaving the people of his charge for a more distinguished station, giving them, with much solemnity, the following advice—"Before I dismiss this topic, there is one thing more which I must by no means omit. It is, that nothing will more contribute to your being at peace among yourselves, both when vacant, and at other times, than keeping strictly to the principles and forms of the Presbyterian church as laid down in our public standards of doctrine and government. By these standards try carefully all doctrines, and conduct scrupulously all your proceedings. Esteem it no hardship or oppression, esteem it as an unspeakable privilege, that these standards are given for your direction and controul." If, my dear brother, we do not here find *another* standard of faith and practice than the Bible, yet we find, to say the least, a standard *additional* or *supplementary* to the Bible; a standard by which *all doctrines are to be tried*, that it may be known whether they are *orthodox*, or *heretical*; a standard by which *all proceedings* are to be adjusted and all actions weighed, to determine whether they are *right* or *wrong*; a standard which is to be esteemed *no hardship or oppression*, but as an *unspeakable privilege*; a standard which is *given*, not by the *inspiration of God*, but by the *wisdom and will of man*; a standard in fine, for the *direction* and *controul* of the professed followers of Him, who is the sole constituted legislator for his people! How strange is this! How passing strange! Is advice like this—is following this advice consistent with that respect and reverence, which are due to the sacred scriptures, as the *only rule* of our faith and practice! Does it not seem too much like making the *commandment of God* of none

effect, by human *traditions*. Does it not have too much the appearance of *teaching for doctrines, the commandments of men*? Does it not look too much like *coveting* and even *assuming* the names *Rabbi, Father, Master*, on *one part*, and on *the other*, of blind reverence and the most unreasonable veneration for those names? Alas! my brother, how many are there who *claim the right*, and *exercise the authority* over their christian brethren, which they never received from Jesus Christ? and how many are there, who, apparently, “*love to have it so!*”





